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ABSTRACT

Since 80% of school leavers drop out with a "C" or higher grade average, poor performance is seldom the issue. This digest outlines a program that uses a comprehensive life-career focus to address youths' continuing learning needs. The program was developed to provide high-school-aged youth the skills, knowledge, and motivation necessary to take responsibility for their life planning. The program is based on the idea that counseling, coaching, and teaching should decrease in intensity as youth become more adaptable and responsible. This career model introduces youth to decisionmaking and career development concepts and has them conduct personal, career-building activities. Youth learn that career building is an ongoing process requiring awareness of current values, beliefs, interests, skills, and knowledge. Instead of being asked to focus on what they want to do with the rest of their lives, students are encouraged to look at "the big picture" of their lives. The program emphasizes direct contact with youth through a two-day workshop and with follow-up sessions. The workshops use an active, process-oriented approach. The program also features print materials for students, teachers, and parents. (RJM)

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ENGAGE: A Career Development-Based, Learning-to-Learn Program for Youth, Parents, and Teachers. ERIC Digest.

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by Marnie E. Robb

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ENGAGE: A Career Development-Based, Learning-to-Learn Program for Youth, Parents, and Teachers

Marnie E. Robb

Overview

Today's youth face unique challenges. To cope with changing economic and social structures, Canadian young people need to be creative and adaptable, and must be able to self-manage their life-career and learning. To do this, they should acquire relevant skills, attitudes, knowledge, and motivation. They need to be able "to learn to learn."

For a variety of reasons, however, many Canadian youth leave school without the competencies they need to make successful transitions into the work place. Since 80% of school leavers drop out with a "C" or higher grade average (Gilberst & Orok, 1993), poor performance is seldom the issue. Youth drop out of school because their studies lack meaning and/or because they have problems outside of school that they are not equipped to handle.

The ENGAGE program, designed as a Canadian Stay-in-School initiative, uses a comprehensive life-career focus to address youths' continuing learning needs. ENGAGE features the following key elements: (a) print materials designed for youth, parents, and teachers; and (b) workshops for youth, parents, and teachers.

The Theory

ENGAGE was developed to provide high-school-aged youth with the skills, knowledge, and motivation necessary to take responsibility for their life planning/learning both inside and outside school. ENGAGE assumes that

1. Young people can effectively direct their own learning.

2. Young people are more likely to direct their own learning when they have both the motivation and the skills to do so.

3. Young people will be more motivated to learn if they see learning as meaningful and goal-directed.

4. Career building helps young people see their learning as goal directed.

ENGAGE is based on Magnusson's, Day's, and Redekopp's (1988) "Hierarchy of Self-Directed Adaptation" which posits that external interventions (e.g., counseling, coaching, teaching) should decrease in intensity as youth become more adaptable and responsible. ENGAGE focuses on four of these levels: formal instruction, consulting (entrenchment), self-help (enhancement), and personal innovation (elaboration).

· *Formal instruction* is the predominant learning mode that youth experience in school. Learning strategies, including study skills, are important for success in formal instruction.

· *Entrenchment* occurs when youth apply what they learn to "real world," non-school settings, including jobs, hobbies, or sports. At this level, youth are encouraged to be pro-active in seeking others who can help them reinforce their learning. To succeed at this level, youth need techniques for selecting and developing relationships with others that allow them to express their needs and obtain useful feedback.

· In *enhancement*, individuals combine external assistance with self-help activities and self-analysis. Youth learn to use self-directed learning resources, such as print products, videos, workshops, and individuals within the youth's network; use self-analysis procedures; and develop protégé/mentor relationships.

· In *elaborating*, youth become proficient at *personal innovation*. Strategies here include "self-created learning" opportunities (e.g., writing and presenting), and "learning by facilitating" which includes teaching, supervising, and mentoring.

ENGAGE introduces youth to current decision-making (Gelatt, 1989) and career development concepts (Redekopp, Fiske, Lemon, & Garber-Conrad, 1994) and has them conduct personal, career-building activities. This is an essential component of ENGAGE because all subsequent activities are based on the results of career building. Instead of being asked to focus on "the big decision" (what they want to do with the rest of their lives), students are encouraged to look at "the big picture" of their lives. Youth learn that career building is an ongoing process requiring awareness of current values, beliefs, interests, skills, and knowledge; visioning, fluid decision-making skills, and tentative setting of shorter- and longer-term goals and intentions within their changing life con-

texts; and continual assessment and re-assessment of their life-career plans as both their personal life circumstances and the world in which they live continues to change.

Products and Services

ENGAGE consists of print products and workshops for youth, teachers, and parents. Youth products include the following:

· *Your Life*. A 44-page, highly visual magazine designed to appeal to young people. It uses career building principles to provide information and motivation.

· *Pocket Powerbook*. A 68-page companion to Your Life that provides "how-to," step-by-step strategies for career building, communicating, studying, self-management, and accessing support systems and networks.

These booklets can be distributed to youth as "stand alone" products or used in conjunction with a workshop.

The adult products include a teacher's guide, a parent's guide, and a workshop leader's guide. The teacher's and parent's guides provide an overview of ENGAGE principles, as well as tips on how to both respond to and support youth as they take control of their learning. The workshop leader's guide is designed to help facilitators (teachers, counselors, club leaders) effectively deliver a motivational two day workshop.

Workshops have been designed for all participants in *ENGAGE*. The two-day youth workshop is described below. Workshops for parents and teachers are independent of the youth workshops and are designed for evening sessions lasting two to three hours.

ENGAGE emphasizes direct contact with youth through a two-day workshop and subsequent follow-up sessions, where students focus on the need to develop learning objectives and maintain a "stay-learning attitude." The workshops use an active, process-oriented approach. The favorite activities are

· *For Love and Money*. Youth are asked to list10 of their favorite activities. The group then brainstorms ways that individuals can make money doing what they love to do.

· *Risk-Taking*. Youth are asked to invest money (candies) at a variety of stations that differ in their degree of risk. In the discussion that follows, students share the types of risks they face in their lives (which often include standing up to their peers or making important life-learning decisions), talk about what makes it okay to take risks, and what stops them from taking risks. Strategies for calculated risk-taking are then presented.

· *Negotiating Skills*. A simple four-step model of collaborative negotiating provides a tool that can be used in a variety of situations. Youth, parents, and teachers have remarked that this skill helps individuals express their needs and listen to and consider others' needs.

As part of the Stay-in-School initiative, ENGAGE workshops were started in six Alberta schools with youth who had been identified by their teachers as being at risk of dropping out of school. Upon completion of the two-day workshop, students showed statistically significant changes in perceived motivation to learn, and expressed more interest in staying in school, spending more time learning out of school, and in developing goals and plans related to learning and their life-career. About 95% of participating students indicated they would like further follow-up sessions.

Conclusion

ENGAGE is a career development program designed to help youth take control of their lives and learning. It includes both print products and workshops designed for youth, parents, and teachers. ENGAGE has been used successfully with a number of at-risk youth in Canadian schools, and it also seems to be appropriate for a broader youth audience.

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